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THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ETHICS

JULY, 1914.

THE NEED FOR A MODERN CASUISTRY.

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MR. F. H. BRADLEY'S famous attack upon casuistry¹ represents, beyond doubt, the feeling of the ordinary man toward that 'false science': and where common sense is supported by such illustrious expert advocacy, it may well feel confident in its own position. Yet it is plain that the attack rested upon one or perhaps upon both of the following assumptions: (*a*) that there are no cases of genuine moral perplexity at all, the intuitions of 'conscience' being always clear and adequate; (*b*) that although difficulties should be found to exist, no help could be got towards their solution from any reflective study of ethical principles and standards. As I am convinced that moral philosophy is not devoid of such practical usefulness, I propose to examine how far these assumptions can be made good. Let us consider them in succession.

It is needless to repeat the argument expounded once for all by the late Professor Henry Sidgwick that the so-called intuitions of Justice, Benevolence, Veracity, Prudence, Self-Control, fail to give definite guidance in certain border cases which undoubtedly arise. It is indeed strange that Mr. Bradley should be the philosopher who lends countenance to belief in the plain man's in-

¹ In "Principles of Logic," pp. 247f.

fallibility in any sphere: for such a view is in flat contradiction to much that he has written about human thinking in general and moral thinking in particular. His characteristic position is rather this, that the moral consciousness conspicuously illustrates the incurable self-contradiction which vitiates thought of every kind. In this section I shall adduce some examples which may supplement those mentioned by Sidgwick, and which are drawn from a province somewhat nearer to common experience. For it is not merely in exceptional cases that we find ourselves morally perplexed; those social problems for the solution of which each of us is in some degree responsible fairly bristle with moral difficulties, and he who does not begin by realizing how sharp those difficulties are is of necessity acting in the dark.

I mention first the questions raised by that feminist movement which takes at times such grotesque and such disgusting forms that we are in danger of ignoring the seriousness of the issues really involved. The changes which have passed over the position of women furnish a long chapter in the history of civilization. No man who has read that chapter with discernment is likely to admire very much the part which his own sex is represented as having played, or to minimize the importance of the evolution that it records, or to feel confident that even yet it is finally closed. But what I wish just now to urge is that the problems at present before us with regard to women are no mere matters of social convenience or economic advantage: they are problems which we shall solve in one way or in another in accordance with the moral values which we assign to certain elements and qualities in life.

What we have to do is to weigh against each other on one side the advantage, perhaps the obligation, of allowing free self-development to human beings of both sexes, and on the other side the bad effects for family and domestic life which may be expected from encouraging

women to adopt independent careers. At present we differentiate sharply: from many callings a woman is legally debarred; from others she is practically excluded by custom and public opinion; even where she is allowed to compete with men, her work is often remunerated on a smaller scale. The effect of these arrangements is to make most women economically dependent: they must look to marriage for a livelihood. Can we reconcile this with the principles of justice and freedom? When Cromwell said that he was in favor of toleration, but not in such a sense as would permit the celebration of the mass, one feels that a more precise formula of religious equality may fairly be asked for. And it is sheer ethical muddleheadedness to repeat phrases about 'the individual's right to self-expression' whilst we concur in preserving by law glaring exceptions to this right and have no rational defense to offer for such infringements of our own rule.

Again, the suffragists are wholly justified in demanding that we shall either cease to ground the right to representation solely upon the payment of taxes, or that we shall produce some reason inherent in sex difference for confining the vote to men. Must we really fall back upon the appeal to brute force? If so, the moral ground on which we have so often declared democracy to rest can never have been sincerely held. Moreover, we are shamefully inconsistent in carrying out even this rough and primitive principle. Do we not for some occult reason distinguish sharply between the municipal and the parliamentary franchise? But moral considerations of very genuine power can be advanced on the other side. When Lord Haldane declared that posterity will look upon our attitude to the suffragists much as we look upon the defenders of slavery, most of us felt that he was guilty of a wild exaggeration if not of a total mistake. The moment we cease to argue the matter upon abstract grounds of 'right' and begin to forecast concrete consequences, feminism seems full of perils. When will the fanatical

section of the women's leaders begin to realize that no estimate of their sex and of its place in society can be other than futile if it leaves out of sight the cardinal function of motherhood? The significance of woman for family life is vastly greater than that of man. And the growing aversion to motherhood, especially in the upper classes, is already of sinister omen for the future of the race. How far is this aversion due, not indeed to the suffrage movement, which is a mere trifle in a far wider agitation, but to the advance, so marked in our time, of the idea that a woman must be permitted to 'live her own life,' and that the old-fashioned restrictions to which our grandmothers cheerfully submitted were badges of female servitude? We condemn as socially pernicious that worship of virginity in the Middle Ages which, so far as its strength went, struck a blow at the very foundations of the family.² Should we not pause before we encourage that disgusting spirit in which women are turning aside from the crowning glory of their sex not through motives of religious fervor, but from unwillingness to forego the social frivolities of a London season? The masculine woman is indeed not only an unlovely but a dangerous type, as the eugenists at least should know. Do we really mean to facilitate by legislation the spread of a similar spirit through the middle and lower classes, where it is happily not yet so influential? If it was a mistaken piety that led the nun to serve God in the cloister rather than in the heroisms of maternal devotion, what shall we say of the woman who will not be a mother that she may direct a business firm or serve in a government office or practise as an attorney? And what sort of wives or mothers may we expect those women to become who have devoted the best years of

² Compare Prof. A. E. Taylor's forcible but surely exaggerated outburst: "One might be tempted to ask whether the ithyphallic emblems of antiquity were not in spirit less obscene and less of a crime against humanity than the withered and flat-bosomed Madonnas of the cheap 'Catholic' print shops." ("Problem of Conduct," p. 215.)

their lives to preparing themselves for efficiency in callings so alien to their sex?

If it be objected that provision must be made for the unmarried women who are obliged to support themselves, it may be replied that something far short of what feminism proposes would meet the needs of this class: surely careers might be distinguished as suitable and unsuitable to female capacity and aptitudes. And the objection to declaring a *carrière ouverte aux talents* without regard to sex difference is partly this, that in time,—and not a very long time,—the nation would have on its hands a disagreeable and inefficient sort of person who had lost the graces of one sex in the effort to acquire the strength of another, and partly this, that such a policy would reinforce the ranks of those who would normally remain unmarried by the addition of others in whom distaste for the natural duties of womanhood had been artificially stimulated.

The moral pros and cons of the suffrage question might be similarly exhibited. Some women, it is said, have a 'stake in the country': have not those who work for their living a greater stake than the women of property, who are, almost all of them, living on the accumulated savings of male relatives? From a practical point of view the omens clearly indicate that any proposal for further strengthening the influence of the propertied classes would not be kindly received. And is there not grave danger that the addition to the electorate of some millions of women would make it a decidedly less competent body for adjudicating upon public affairs? It is idle to point out that many women would be much better judges of a political issue than many men who are now entrusted with votes. Would not the *average* of capacity be seriously lowered by including a class, immense in point of numbers, which *as* a class is notoriously less interested in, less informed about, and, I think, from emotional and temperamental causes, less likely to exercise cool and impartial judgment in public matters

than the body of men to whom the franchise is now confined?

However, for my present purpose there is no need to attempt a comparative estimate of the value of these conflicting arguments. It is enough if I have shown that the issues involved are at bottom moral issues, not in the sense of speculative difficulties about standard and faculty, but in the sense of urgent questions of practice in which what one man thinks obviously right, another of equally high principle and equally good intentions thinks obviously wrong. The intensely ethical nature of the issue is still clearer when some one objects, as many do object, that this method of forecasting consequences is in such a question essentially immoral; the thing, we are told, is a plain matter of right, and whatever use or misuse women may make of their votes, we are no more entitled to withhold from them what is theirs than to deprive our neighbor of his farm because we think we could till it better than he and thus make the soil more productive. On the other side it is insisted that no intelligent conscience, either personal or social, can prescribe what ought to be done without trying to anticipate the results of each alternative, that there is no such intuition of 'equal rights to a vote,' that in many cases the privilege of self-government is quite justifiably withheld even from a whole nation. It is clear that the question is one which will brook little further delay; and if there is anywhere an issue on which moral philosophy may be expected to throw some light, it is surely this one. Quite possibly the judgment of either side may be right, but certainly both cannot be right, and the system we have in practice is nothing but a compromise in which we act now on the one principle, now on the other,—when asked for reasons, most persons who defend the *status quo* can think of none except such as are so stupid that they are ashamed to produce them. Even if, as may conceivably be the case, such a compromise is on the whole best, it would surely be more intelligent to

become aware of the grounds which justify it, and it can hardly happen that the *best* compromise is reached by leaving things to random chance.

Again, one may think of the innumerable questions arising from the reciprocal relations of employers and employed, and from the attitude of the State to both. There was a time when those who urged that such problems had a moral aspect were treated as intruders; they were told that the whole thing was purely a matter of business, and that any interference on the part of the State with freedom of contract between the workman and his master would mean the deathknell of commercial prosperity. 'Scientific' evidence was tendered in the same direction: the Factory Acts had nowhere more implacable opponents than amongst the official representatives of economic theory. That time is past: on such matters as rate of wages, hygienic condition of mills and workshops, hours of labor, minimum age for operatives, distribution of profits, the moral consciousness of the present age refuses to be stifled by a reference to the 'law of demand and supply.' And the predictions of the pundits of economic doctrine have been completely, even ludicrously, falsified.

But, while we now definitely recognize the moral issues involved in such problems, the solution to be offered to them on the moral side is far from obvious and the voice of 'conscience' is far from clear.

It is plain that there is something thoroughly immoral in the methods by which the public is exploited by Trusts, Rings, and Bosses: we agree that the man who becomes a millionaire by 'cornering' wheat and thus compelling his neighbors either to buy at his price or to starve, is a scoundrel of the first order; but we also recognize the great social advantages which accrue from the principle of leaving an open field to ability, enterprise, commercial sagacity. Can anyone put his finger on the point at which the legitimate reward of superior business acumen may be said to end and extortion may be said to begin? Is

there such a thing as a *reasonable* profit? Ought a company to be permitted to pay more than a certain maximum dividend to its shareholders? Should a limit be set, and if so can we so set it as to be able to say with any confidence that until the profits reach that limit, restricting them would mean robbing the company, and, after they pass that limit, allowing them to advance would mean robbing the public? There are signs that the question of the income which a firm may draw from its business must be ethically considered not less than that of the income which a landlord may draw from his rents. But no one who has given it the least thought can doubt that this matter bristles with moral, not less than with economic, difficulties.

Again, what shall we say of the alleged 'right to work' which the Labor party presses upon our notice? Has the unemployed worker a right to demand that he be given something to do by the State and that a 'living wage' be paid to him for doing it? If we answer that question, as many persons do, with a glib negative, what we say is tantamount to this, that for that appallingly large number of persons who can work, who are willing to work, and who cannot obtain work, there does not exist even a right to life. Will the moral consciousness bear us out in this? If not, then how shall we answer the question, "What is a living wage?" Does it mean simply a wage that is sufficient to provide the laborer with bodily sustenance and shelter, or ought it to include the means of education and in some degree the opportunity of mental culture and enjoyment for his family? Ought it to be enough to enable him to marry at an early age? Or should the indigent worker be compulsorily celibate? On the one hand the prevention by economic pressure of early marriages is fraught with obvious moral danger; on the other hand it is widely felt that to burden the public with the necessity of supporting, not only the worker himself, but also as many children as he may choose to bring into the world, would create

in time an intolerable situation. Very much the same arguments and counter-arguments may be urged in regard to the proposal, so popular among the Socialists, for the State feeding of the pupils in primary schools.

Anyone who has watched the behavior and has listened to the claims of both sides during the fierce industrial conflicts with which we are being made increasingly familiar, must recognize that both employers and workmen are often passionately convinced that they are morally in the right. Each party, I have no doubt, in many cases honestly believes, not only that it is right, but that the other party is for the time being devoid of conscience or sense of duty. The masters speak of the 'rights of property' and the workers speak of the 'rights of man.' Plainly, both these phrases stand for something that the moral consciousness must admit to be real and important; and while heated partisans, whose judgment is warped by passion or by class interest, cannot perhaps be expected to see any side but their own, it is a perfect scandal that men professing to make a study of the principles of right social conduct have so far given so little guidance to public opinion on the matter. Moral philosophers are indeed unanimous in condemning 'theft,' and they are prepared to wrangle at any length in support of many theories of the ethical 'standard' which, though flatly contradictory of one another, have the singular characteristic of leading to precisely the same ethical conclusion; but when in a concrete case the master says that the workman is a 'highway robber' and the workman replies that the master is a 'disguised thief,' professional moralists refuse to arbitrate, taking refuge in the enunciation of abstract principles that are an idle mockery of those who must decide whether the master or the workman should go to gaol.

Another problem is presented, and it recurs under many forms, in the matter of the limits of State interference with the freedom of action of the individual. What else was really at the bottom of the strife between

the Church of England and Nonconformity regarding the Board Schools and the Voluntary Schools? The complaint of the nonconformists was (1) that they were being forced to contribute rates for the support of religious teaching in which they did not believe, (2) that the State was arranging things so as to make it exceedingly difficult and expensive for a nonconformist father to find a school in which his child might receive secular education without coming under influences which were likely to undermine the faith in which his father desired him to be brought up, and (3) that a religious test was being imposed upon candidates for the State-paid teaching profession. The reply offered by the representatives of Anglicanism took indeed very frequently the form of a denial that such results would follow from the proposed legislation or of a claim that results were exaggerated; and these pleas, in so far as they were true, were, no doubt, legitimately urged, and were by far the most effective for the electioneering platform. But it was plain that when all due allowance had been made for distortions of fact on either side, the issue was in substance just a form of that which divides the supporters from the opponents of State Establishment for a particular church. Preferential treatment for a particular denomination was beyond all question being proposed: nonconformists were undoubtedly to be forced to contribute rates towards the maintenance of Anglican teaching, in a sense in which no Anglican had to assist in the maintenance of nonconformist teaching. Is this morally defensible? Has the State a moral right to insist on its own way; that is, on the way voted for by the majority in a general election, when the matter involved is one that touches the religious scruples of the minority? Has the parent the sole right to decide under what influences, moral and religious or non-moral and non-religious, his child shall be brought up? On the one hand, few, I think, would contend that a father ought to be allowed to have his child nurtured in an educational environment which is dis-

tinctly and avowedly demoralizing. On the other hand, the justice and expediency of religious toleration and of, in some sense, religious equality, will not be seriously questioned. Surely here is a case for those who profess expert knowledge of social ethics to help that very large number, especially of laymen, who are sincerely perplexed. And if on such a point they say nothing, because they have nothing useful to say, does not that suggest that their speculations have been too much in the clouds, and that it is time for the philosopher to remember Plato's warning and reënter the cave?

Or one may adduce that large group of problems arising from the sexual and family relationships. Here, more perhaps than anywhere else in the sphere of morals, one is safe in relying upon that sort of 'intuitive' conviction which expresses itself in the words, 'I can give no reason, but my feelings tell me that such conduct is wrong.' This arises from the fact that the highest morality in sexual matters cannot be formulated in those utilitarian terms which may plausibly avail us elsewhere, but is a kind of unconscious corollary from that system of feelings, infinitely complex and infinitely delicate, which we call the Christian ideal of marriage. At the same time, whilst on the highest level there is little room for questions to obtrude themselves, one must remember that actual sex relationships are often much lower than the highest, and it becomes a question whether anything is gained by forcing them into formal agreement whilst they remain in essential discord with ideal conditions. No one doubts that it is best for the marriage tie to be permanent; yet the majority of persons, almost all Protestants at least, admit under certain circumstances the legitimacy of divorce. Will anyone pretend that the precise nature of the circumstances is a matter of intuition? And what of those urgent questions of which we are being told so much by the eugenists? The case is very far from being as simple as the rash advocates of particular schemes would have us believe. No one doubts

the calamitous character of the facts; but the program that is too often set before us recalls the title of Huxley's famous pamphlet, "Social Diseases and Worse Remedies." It is clear that marriages are often contracted by persons who are unfit for parentage, and whose offspring will probably be themselves incurable sufferers, and at the same time a burden, if not a menace, to society. Every effort is commendable which aims at enlightening such persons as to the responsibilities which they are assuming, and at so awakening their consciences on the matter that they may be deterred in time. But when it is proposed to prevent such marriages by legislative enactment, we must surely ask ourselves at what point we mean to draw the line in such State interference, how far we can expect such measures to be efficacious, and how far we are entitled to penalize the living for the sake of problematical advantages to the unborn. If we are right in thinking that to forecast consequences is of the very essence of moral action, then such considerations as these are morally imperative, and we shall find that they often resolve themselves into a comparative estimate of the moral values we assign to this result and to that. Could anything, for example, be more naïve than the proposal to deal with the matter by requiring a medical certificate as a prerequisite to marriage? What appalling moral consequences must ensue! Or shall we boldly adopt that system of wholesale infanticide prescribed by Plato, and, apparently (if he means it in earnest), recommended in modern times by Mr. Bradley? A drastic measure indeed, while our medical authorities are wrangling so furiously with one another as to whether heredity is really of much significance in the spread of disease.

The foregoing may seem truistic; but it seemed worth while to illustrate at such length for two purposes. I wished to show that for instances in which doubt may arise we need not search the biographies of men and women exceptionally circumstanced; nor are they to be

found merely in the imaginary situations created by the writer of sensational fiction or by the 'problem' dramatist. Even if they occurred only in such places, they would have an interest for the moralist, the kind of interest, for example, that is aroused by the immortal figures of Antigone and Œdipus. But I am speaking of moral philosophy as a guide to practice, and the practical person will at once object that the kind of perplexities there depicted, whilst abstractly conceivable, must occur so seldom as to be negligible in ordinary life. The situations I have instanced are becoming more common and more urgent every day: in a democratic State they have got to be dealt with by the ordinary man. And my second purpose was to show that the issues raised are in the last analysis *moral* issues. Indeed, it is just because they are moral issues that people differ so widely in the way they face them. There is no manner of agreement as to the elements in life which we think it most valuable to produce and to preserve. We have now to consider how far a reflective study of ethics will illumine the road.

It is, I trust, unnecessary to spend time in distinguishing the position that I mean to defend from that of the mediæval casuist, or in showing that I am not committed to an apology for all the abuses of the Roman confessional. In any case, the distinction has been drawn with sufficient clearness by various writers: I refer anyone who is not yet convinced to the unanswerable passage on the subject in Dr. Rashdall's "Theory of Good and Evil." The account there given of the historical origin and actual practice of casuistry ought to dispel the lingering doubts of those who see no difference in principle between, for example, Sidgwick's "Methods of Ethics" and the "Artesana" or the "Summa Rosella." It is one thing to think about morality in order to obtain from it the best and clearest light we can; it is another deliberately to prostitute the subtleties of dialectic in order to provide plausible defense for the liar and the perjurer.

We may endorse Mr. Bradley's lurid judgment: "It was the lust for spiritual tyranny that choked the last whisper of the unsanctified conscience"; but we need not infer that everyone who seeks by the most sincere and persevering reflection to enlighten his own conscience as well as that of his neighbor is aiming at a similar domination. Surgery in the interests of health is different from surgery as an instrument of assassination.

Now, in the first place, it seems fair to insist that the burden of proof lies upon those who deny, not upon those who assert the utility of ethical knowledge. For, *prima facie*, ethics may be expected to throw some light upon the subject which it undertakes to discuss. If it is a genuine science at all, as is surely admitted, why limit it in a way in which no other concrete science is limited? Several reasons are assigned which I shall consider in succession.

(1) It is said that to make moral philosophy a guide to moral action reverses the natural and the genuine order. For a man does not act rightly because he has passed through a process in which the pros and cons of alternative courses are intellectually weighed. It is argued that the true function of ethics is to accept the deliverances of the moral consciousness as its data, and to draw from these whatever philosophical inferences and interpretations they seem to justify. And we are told that one might as well hope to cure his dyspepsia by learning physiology as to become morally better by a course in moral philosophy.

This argument seems to me not only invalid as an objection to casuistry, but to contain the germ of a complete justification of casuistry as a science. I welcome the analogy that it suggests with the theoretical study of digestion. It is true that moral experience is not the consequence, but the presupposition of moral philosophy, just as life is the precondition of physiology, and the plant is the precondition of botany. Digestion was admirably carried out before anyone understood the theory

of its processes, and is to-day often most effective in those who hardly know that they have stomachs at all. Similarly the moral ideal may be approached with most fidelity and grace by those to whose unsophisticated minds the notion of moral antinomies has never suggested itself. But if digestion goes wrong, is all knowledge of physiology of no use in setting it right? The *vis medicatrix naturæ* may indeed be the best curative agent known; it may be at bottom the sole power upon which therapeutics can rely; but if a man has swallowed a substance with which his digestive organs cannot deal, he will hardly be saved unless some one understands theoretically the results which may be anticipated, and can prescribe the best means, medicinal or surgical, by which those results may be counteracted. Some one, in short, must be able, not indeed to create the *vis medicatrix naturæ* itself, but to remove the hindrances to its efficient working. And, though an effective artificial conscience can no more be created than an effective artificial stomach, yet the action of the organ with which nature has endowed us may be facilitated in the one case very much as in the other. In the case of moral perplexity I shall argue that the source is often removable, because it consists in incomplete analysis of circumstances, in the want of clearness with which the moral problem is formulated, or in mistaken and confused assumptions about what we mean by good, about what things *are* good, and about the proportions in which they are good. It may be within the power of systematic reflection to dispel some or all of these causes of error. That point must be tested by trial, and our justification as casuists, if it should turn out that we *are* justified, must come from our success. The attempt cannot here be made in any detail: what I am now contending for is that the issue should not be prejudged by *a priori* considerations asserting the intrinsic impossibility of our task. Such considerations might be urged with precisely equal force against artificial interference with the proc-

esses of the body, on the ground that nature as a preserver of health is infinitely superior to the best drugs and the best surgery.

(2) In the second place, it is urged that the introspective habit of mind when directed towards one's moral condition is unhealthy. It is not the robust but the neurotic man who is constantly feeling his own pulse and examining his own arteries; the vigorous leave these alone, and they do their work best when they are not watched. Moreover, constant brooding upon the state of one's soul is not merely a symptom, it is also likely to become a cause of moral enfeeblement. This is conspicuously seen in a special department of wrongdoing with which casuistry has very much concerned itself: for what could be more likely to produce laxity in sexual conduct than the constant turning of one's attention to sexual impulses and the constant analyzing of degrees of refinement and of heinousness in the sins of the flesh? Do we not find in the strenuousness of actual living rather than in the minuteness of a morbid self-scrutiny that moral tonic which the system requires?

There is much in this objection that is both true and important; but it contains also the flaw of assuming that by a practical study of ethics we mean chiefly a process of inquiry into the nature and value of one's motives. Moreover, it erects into a barrier against the whole idea of casuistry a danger which belongs to one of its aspects alone. Our critic is limiting the discussion to a narrow field in which the ground is favorable to himself: for there is obvious tactical advantage in disputing the claims of casuistry solely on that plane where illustrations can be drawn from the manuals of the confessional and the records of monastic practice.

The view that ethics exists for the comparative valuation of 'springs of conduct,' and for this alone, has indeed been advanced, notably by Dr. James Martineau; and for those who accept it I see no escape from the obligation to constant self-analysis, however unpleasant

and even dangerous this process may at times become. But the difficulty is much lessened if we take the objective standpoint; that is, if we accept it as our business to study primarily the *consequences of different kinds of action*, to estimate in what degree they severally contribute towards personal and social 'good.' Motives may indeed be the things to which the epithet good has the most important application, but they are not the only things which can be so described: they must be treated together with all the rest. Moreover, the quality of a man's motive is as a rule to be judged from the effect of the external acts which he performs: he is responsible, as Henry Sidgwick used to say, for the consequences of his action "so far as those consequences can be foreseen"; we may have enough faith in humanity to believe that many wrong things are done, not because the will is anti-social, but because the results of an act are not fully realized when it is being carried out, and we may hope that when superior insight and more complete knowledge show a man further results which are likely to ensue and which he did not himself anticipate or desire, the act may not be repeated.

Again, it is not maintained that the theoretical study of morality ought to be undertaken by everybody. Least of all should the average person be encouraged to pry into that field, always more or less disagreeable, and sometimes indescribably disgusting, which is presented by sexual aberrations. I am willing to admit that, in this matter, while the expert some time ago was unduly reticent towards the public, just now he shows signs of becoming unduly communicative. Yet even here it may well be contended that we have trusted too far to the 'unsophisticated conscience.' It is noteworthy that the assurance which bids us 'leave those matters alone' is felt and expressed chiefly by those who have no means of knowing what happens where their advice is followed. No medical man, I think, and no clergyman, who have been able to elicit the confidence of those with whom they

professionally deal, will endorse the judgment that this field of morality can be trusted to take care of itself. And, surely, here at least Mr. Bradley cannot make good his view that ethics is unable to say *why* things are right and why they are wrong. Against the common everyday breaches of sexual morality convincing reasons, domestic, physiological, and in the strict sense moral, can be produced. No doubt, here as elsewhere there is room for difficulty, though I think the 'problems' are far fewer and far more soluble than the sex novelist with a keen eye to circulation among a prurient public would have us believe. By common consent most of the ground constitutes what we may call, to parody a parliamentary phrase, 'agreed morality,' and I cannot help thinking that some instruction on such subjects, other than the usual authoritative prohibitions and the usual silencing of inquiry, ought to be given as childhood passes into youth. Such instruction must even in its simplest form take the line of pointing out the consequences which sexual sins bring after them. I appeal for confirmation to the experience of any schoolmaster who may read these pages.

Further, can any intelligent person in these days of inquiry refrain from some degree of thoughtfulness about the rationale of conduct? Surely, everyone should be encouraged and so far as possible helped towards the habit of forecasting results, of asking himself what influence the things he does and the manner of life he leads are likely to exert upon social well-being. It is, I claim, impossible to draw any sharp dividing line of principle between that practical science of ethics which I am endeavoring to commend and the more or less systematic reflection which all except the most ignorant, the most stupid, and the most reckless, actually bring to bear in some degree upon the ordering of their conduct.

(3) But, it will be asked, do you really suggest the creation of a class of moral 'experts,' possessing a knowledge to which the ordinary person is not advised or is

perhaps even forbidden to aspire, a class to whom difficulties may be referred and by whom *ex cathedra* decisions will be pronounced? Is not moral choice fundamentally a matter of private judgment? Can I commit my conscience into any man's keeping, however profoundly 'expert' I may think him to be in drawing ethical distinctions and deciding ethical issues?

This is a real difficulty. We cannot too strongly insist that no reason whatever must be held to dispense a man from doing that which in his heart and conscience he himself believes to be right. Nor is it enough to reply that our modern casuist would not, like the confessor, impose an authoritative command, a command which must be obeyed whatever the penitent may think of its justification, and a command whose validity cannot be questioned without further sin. Our practical philosopher will indeed assign grounds for what he says, will aim at convincing the moral reason, or,—perhaps it would be better to put it thus,—he will set before those in perplexity considerations relevant to the case of which they had not themselves thought, and will then leave the burden of decision on the individual conscience of each person who has got to act. But it is plain that where the answer to a puzzling question depends in some degree upon a body of systematized knowledge, the opinion of those who have made such knowledge the subject of prolonged study and have become proficient in dealing with it must carry special weight with the layman. Is there a legitimate place for authority in ethics? On this I offer the following remarks:

(a) No one can deny that for some persons, and at some periods of life, moral influence must take the form of authoritative precept. The young child is made truthful and honest and kind, not by a reasoned account of the *rationale* of these qualities, but through the affectionate respect with which he receives the teaching of parent or schoolmaster. If European colonists in a savage district where polyandry was practised could obtain

the same sort of influence over the natives which a normal parent exercises over his child, would they not be justified in authoritatively stopping that mode of life? Development will bring, we hope, in both cases a condition of mind for which the principle of authority need no longer be invoked; but is there not this preliminary stage? And is there any essential difference between such cases and that, for example, of the person who distrusts his own judgment and seeks advice from his clergyman? So far as the latter is fitted, morally and intellectually, to apply the Christian ethics to the situation, surely such an appeal is both right and reasonable. A person of specially high character may so influence a neighborhood as to transform its moral tone. No doubt he does so as a rule by his example, while the authority which would belong to our supposed casuist would rest on intellectual qualifications. But if a difficulty turns on power to appreciate the intricacies of a complex position, upon matters of knowledge rather than upon delicate ethical discernment, it might be argued that the average man is still more entitled to lean upon the judgment of another whom he thinks wiser than himself. The tables might indeed be turned upon the extreme advocate of moral autonomy. One might say to him: "We both agree that I must bring to bear upon this situation all the light I can. The proper course for me to take is to be discovered in part by accurate knowledge and correct forecasting of consequences. I sincerely believe that my adviser's analysis of circumstances is more likely to be right than my own. Am I not bound in conscience to accept it?" Surely no one but a fanatic for 'autonomy' will say that whoever asks his friend: "What do you think it is my duty to do in this matter," is taking an immoral step. Granted that in the vast majority of cases the responsibility of decision cannot be shifted from one's own shoulders, will not the 'moral consciousness of the best men' support the view that where reasons for and against a proposed action are very evenly

balanced, a person who is really confused is to be commended rather than blamed if he resorts to a guide on whose superior power of deciding rightly and on whose honesty in giving advice he has good reason to believe that he may rely?

(b) Moreover, our supposed casuist will not as a rule venture to say concretely what should or should not be done. Dr. Rashdall has aptly compared his function to that of a judge in charging the jury. He gives no lead on 'questions of fact': he lays down principles, he explains the law as to what is and is not evidence, he sets forth and contrasts the points for and against the prisoner; he tries to save the jurymen from the rhetoric of counsel, from the cunningly devised artifices by which special pleaders excite prejudice and warp judgment. But with the twelve plain men rests the issue of fact and the decision by which the fate of the accused is sealed. Similar help might well be provided for a conscience quite as much exposed in its own inmost recesses to distorting influence and special pleading. Personal interests and personal passions work mightily: which of us has not at times found these forces so strong that we welcomed an unbiased opinion, and when we obtained it, began at once to see things in the situation that we would never otherwise have realized at all? Which of us has not been assisted by having the results of each alternative course set before us with a fullness and a truthfulness with which our emotions and our impulses made it impossible for us to marshal them ourselves?

(4) This last objection is by far the most formidable which the defender of casuistry has to meet, and I have advanced reasons to show that even this one is not insuperable. We may at once dismiss the futile difficulty raised by some that every moral situation is unique, involving many individual circumstances, so that general rules are inapplicable. Whatever force belongs to this argument might be turned with equal plausibility against every practical science whatever, and I think it has al-

ready been met by implication. Let me conclude with an illustrative case. Most of us are agreed that political science teaches the advantageousness of allowing a community to govern itself. The concrete question arises whether we should or should not give a larger measure of self-government to India. How are we going to answer it? No one but a fanatic of one type would say that it is to be answered by the mechanical application of this general principle. Again, no one but a fanatic of another type would say that the need for common sense in its employment proves the principle to be of no value at all. Self-government is a good thing, but public order and peace are also good; facilities for intellectual progress are good, the restraint of religious fanaticism is good: these and many other considerations must be carefully thought about; we must weigh the probabilities of the concrete situation, we must balance immediate disorders against more remote and problematical advantages,—and we must, if we are to act intelligently, have some clear view of the comparative moral values. General maxims may thus be used without being abused; and some such procedure is plainly followed by those conscientious persons who declaim against casuistry in words, but are often quite competent casuists in practice. What I am pleading for is simply a better informed, a more systematic, and as Mr. Bradley would say, a more ‘obstinate’ attempt to work out the theory of that code which we all practically, unconsciously, but often incoherently apply.

To sum up very briefly: For about twenty-five centuries the minds of philosophers have been at work on the scientific study of moral phenomena. Generation after generation has had its body of experts who have professed, as the result of their specialized reflections, to know more than the common herd can know about social duties and obligations. The common herd has a right to expect that these experts will have something to say, not merely about those actions of whose morality

or immorality no decent man has the smallest doubt, but also about situations which involve a conflict of maxims and thus place the ordinary man in grave perplexity. Can no help be obtained in unravelling moral knots from those who have made or should have made the study of such knots their peculiar business? Instead of such practical assistance to persons in distress, what most moral philosophers have to offer is a more or less precarious speculation about the grounds which make it obligatory as a rule to speak the truth, or to abstain from homicide, or to preserve one's sobriety. Of such speculations there seems to be no end: they are, of course, important, and even the 'practical' person will be very patient of them if they give promise of leading through general laws to detailed guidance in doubtful cases. Alas! they show little sign of this. Is it not time for the philosophers to follow the advice of William James that they should cease "pawing the ground and champing their bits"?

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THE prejudice against casuistry is universal. But along with this popular aversion goes an equally general ignorance of the real meaning of casuistry. Those who are loudest in their denunciation of it would be hard put to it to say exactly what it is. They would probably mutter some *cliché* such as 'laxity of morals,' 'Jesuit subtlety,' 'pandering to vice,' and so on. It may be suggested that this popular prejudice against casuistry is one of those unexamined presuppositions which infect all our thought with error. Whatever province of ordinary experience we take, we find that it consists of opinions adopted we know not when nor how nor why.